

Testimony in Support of Keeping Oak Chapel UMC's Food Hub Open

Dear Members of the Montgomery County Council,

My name is Serge Thomas, and I am the Director of Community Engagement & Partnerships for Oak Chapel United Methodist Church's Consolidated Services Hub, located at 14500 Layhill Road in Silver Spring, MD (20906). We are located in the Mid-County Region, serving the most under-resourced and underserved zip code community in Montgomery County. We serve on a weekly basis 600 families, and hundreds more through our on and off-site food distributions to apartments and individual homes in the Glenmont/Aspen Hill/Layhill areas. Not only do we distribute food, we also distribute baby essentials and work with our partners to offer access to services ranging from healthcare, childcare, to job opportunities during our weekly distributions.

Oak Chapel is an integral part of the 20906 community, and I want to give you a few statistics showing how integral it is:

FY23 Demographics of Hub Clients

- 70% Hispanic/Latino
- 20% Asian
- 5% African descent
- 5% Caucasian

Based on data from 2021, within a 2.5 mile radius of Oak Chapel UMC a snapshot of the community is revealed¹:

- 9.7 percent live below the poverty level.
- 34.5 percent of households make less than \$25,000 a year.
- 35.8 percent of families who own a home only have one vehicle, the number increases to 39.1 percent for families renting a home.

STATS FOR FY23 (July 1 - Feb 25)

- # Households: 19,142
- # Individuals: 83,062
- # Children: 33,048
- # Seniors: 14,280
- # Pounds of food: 669,970 lbs

Oak Chapel is disappointed to hear that the County Government wishes to close our Hub. While we understand that the budget for the County will be different from the previous fiscal year, the needs of our Hub's community haven't changed. Oak Chapel has grown in its outreach and partnerships over the last few years, and we have plans on doing more work in the community. We don't believe that closing our Hub will serve the residents of our community in any way.

We've been told that DHHS plans on asking other hubs not located in the Glenmont/Aspen Hill area to use their mobile services to serve the 20906 area. Why have other hubs expend resources to travel far afield when you have a hub in this area already in operation? No other hub has had to fight so hard for its very existence as much as Oak Chapel, and last fiscal year (FY23) we were funded by funds from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) passed by the U.S. Congress.

1 Source: MissionInsight Report.

We ask that the County Council include us in the regular budget as all the other hubs are. Oak Chapel is capable of delivering services to our community and we ask that the County Government trust us to do so.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I hope that the Council will do the right thing for our community.